ART. IV.—THE LABOUR PROBLEM: PAST AND PRESENT.

THE Social question—and the labour difficulty with which this paper is alone concerned is more than half the Social question—has been called a new question; it is not any more new than the moon. Like the latter it has its phases; and all that is novel about it is, that its present aspect is new to this generation. The Social problem has been often formulated, but never so completely or forcibly as in the Divine Parable of Dives and Lazarus. In thrilling and terrible contrast are there placed the poor man and the rich, both here "upon this bank and shoal of time," and on that ocean unbounded and soundless—the dread Hereafter. Various are the devices proposed in our age for assuaging or healing the sores of Lazarus; the Trade Unionist proposes organisation of labour; the Socialist, the emancipation of the land and capital of Dives to be henceforward managed by the community in the interests of all; while the Nihilist fiercely suggests that in order to improve the health of Lazarus, the constitution of Dives must be shattered with a dynamite bomb. The Christian invites Lazarus to be patient, and entreats Dives to make to himself friends of the Mammon of iniquity by taking his wounded brother to his bosom. From the four cardinal points rise these four voices on the world in this last decade of our dying century. To which of them will this cavernous, old world listen? In the answer to this question lies the solution of the problem.

The song of the labourer no longer accompanies the sound of his tools; hoarse murmurs, hoarser than the groaning of machinery, rise funereally on the murky air—the murmurs of discontent. Strikes have taken place all over the world during the last thirty months; formerly they occurred in isolated groups—they were not even national—now they are international. It would be impossible to say in which country this last great strike movement began. In America in 1886, no less than 9861 strikes and lock-outs took place, accompanied by riots and the loss of many lives. In 1887 the number of strikes was only about one-half of those in 1886, and the decline continued until this year, when, following a movement begun in Europe, an epidemic of strikes again broke out in the United States. In whatever country, however, the present movement began I cannot help connecting the germs of the social discontent which led to it with Germany. There the movement has developed so much importance as to engross recently the attention of the Emperor

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